

TESTIMONIALS:

"The GSM Conference - It was the best five days of my life!"

- Wilson M.
North Carolina, USA

"GSM 2017 and Pride were one of the highlights of my year. For being a new conference it was an incredible success..."

- Michael E.
Florida, USA

"The Gay & Sober Men's Conference was a truly transformative experience. To be among so many gay and sober men and to feel such love and warmth from the entire city was incredible. The weekend was a perfect blend of program and pleasure."

- Matthew H..
North Carolina, USA

"The event was just a few days but the friends and memories are for a lifetime."

- Gerry P.
California, USA

"Awesome group. Awesome men!"

- Richard W.
Wisconsin, USA

"I'm very grateful for this group. This page has really helped me stay connected with recovery even when I'm on the go. Thank you, all of you, for sharing your experience, strength, and hope!"

- Kekoa K.
Hawaii, USA

"The one and only worldwide site for gay, sober, guys. In my experience, well run, informative, and the embodiment of the fellowship. A fantastic resource."

- Kevin O'K.
Brighton, UK

"I really appreciate all this group has done for me, my only wish is that since we have such a fairly large gay community here in Boise Idaho that our sober group would be a little larger and stronger the need is there 2017 hope to meet many of you there!"

- Danny B.
Idaho, USA

"This is a safe place for people to share their successes as well as struggles in sobriety, and get positive support and feedback as requested. It's a great way to meet and feel connected with like minded sober men all over the world, which broadens my sober support network from my local community to

worldwide. Who can ask for much more. Oh I can, I'm so excited about the GSM conference coming up in June in NYC, where I'll get to meet lots of these guys in person and share incredible experiences. This group has it all."

- Steven B.
Georgia, USA

"This is an excellent forum for gay males to support each other and share in our growth and challenges throughout our sober journeys. Bravo!"

- Michael F.
Arizona, USA

"Very well run site, great source to get advice but be ready for some strong opinions . Just remember to take what you need and leave the rest because Mary gets a little crazy at times. Discussing thing with your Sponsor can help you navigate through some of the weeds."

- Jim D.
Connecticut, USA

"When I was in a bad place and did not want to go out, I was able to meet several people that became friends and provided daily support. With their encouragement, I was able to keep going. I love this group."

- Jackson D.
California, USA

"Five Stars!"

- Patrick K.
London, United Kingdom

A CONFERENCE FOR GAY & SOBER MEN

December 17th, 2017



* THIS ARTICLE WAS CO-WRITTEN BY CHRIS HEIDE, Editor in Chief of Chosen Magazine, and Seamus Kirst, author of the memoir, *Shitfaced: Musings of a Former Drunk*. *

Learning how to have fun in sobriety is of paramount importance to Gay & Sober Men, The Conference.

Gay & Sober Men (GSM) started out as a Facebook group. In its early days of solely existing on social media, its mission was to offer a refuge for gay men in recovery - a welcome respite from a world that they say can so heavily be focused on drugs, alcohol and partying.

GSM launched their first annual conference last year. The conference was founded by a group of sober friends who wanted to carry on in the tradition of Hot n Dry, a now defunct conference that was once held annually in Palm Springs.

This celebration of sobriety and recovery was held last year during NYC Pride weekend. It included a host of activities including yoga, meetings, workshops, dance parties and fellowship. Even more important than the scheduled events, the weekend allowed for a group of gay men, who may have felt ostracized from the LGBT community as a result of their recovery, to come together and form a supportive network.

"I got involved with Gay & Sober Men-The Conference early in sobriety because it gave me a sense of belonging and purpose," said Jeremiah Johnson, one of the board members of the Gay & Sober. "For so long I took from everyone and everything that crossed my path. Gay & Sober gave me the ability to show up for others when they necessarily didn't want to show up for themselves. What I didn't know when getting involved with Gay & Sober it would change my life forever. Today I have found my tribe."

The organizers said the goal of the weekend was to celebrate recovery and to create an atmosphere that promotes genuine, substance free fun. Due to the success of the 2017 event, GSM will again hold the conference in NYC during Pride weekend. GSM is unusual in its conception, in that it is not specific to AA. Although many GSM members are participants in 12 step programs, the GSM conferences welcomes any gay man who is engaged on a path of recovery. This inclusionary view helps to foster a sense of togetherness among a group of men who might normally be divided and fractured, they said. "Getting out of my comfort zone and going to the conference was the biggest leap of faith I have ever taken- and by far the most rewarding", said Kekoa Kealoha, one of the conference attendees. "I am deeply grateful for the genuine excitement, connection and love that I felt."

That's what sobriety is about, after all. Learning how to have fun, when even the idea of fun seems unattainable. For every addict and alcoholic, the ability to enjoy life is a keystone of recovery. While our paths may be different, our desire to find connection and discover fun is a powerful commonality.

We write about our experiences with seeking fun below.

Chris Heide, Editor in Chief of Chosen Magazine:

Here's the thing about addiction. Not only is it a brutal, debilitating illness, but it is also a thief. A thief of relationships, time, money and happiness. Years of my life were stolen by the addict within me. During my time of active use, I had lost ability to experience pleasure, fun, contentment and happiness. I was a slave to drugs and alcohol. I needed drugs to socialize. To have sex. To function in the world. To wake up every morning.

For nearly 6 years, everything was tainted by the intoxicating allure of drugs and alcohol. It was easy for me to mistake happiness for the chemical feeling of euphoria. That feeling was my best friend, my champion, my lover and my absolute worst nightmare. I convinced myself that every emotion needed to be intensified and that every experience needed to be memorable. The addict in my head lied to me. He told me that if I did not chemically alter my thoughts and feelings, then any experience I had would be worthless. After a while, I had forgotten what it was like to have sex, or watch a film, or enjoy a concert without chemical aid. In fact, the thought of embarking on those very normal human experiences in a sober state of mind was terrifying.

When I finally got sober in 2013, I truly believed that I would not be able to experience happiness ever again. I felt that drugs and alcohol had robbed me of that right. It was my consequence, my burden, to walk through life in a sober, boring state. Thankfully, that fear could not have been further from the truth.

Sobriety has given me countless gifts. Not only do I have a life I never imagined possible, but I am able to contribute to the world. No longer am I driven by my addictive impulses. The ability to fully present in my life has been returned to me.

Since getting sober, I have taken countless trips. I have developed a love for the theater, concerts and live shows. Even sex is better than I could have ever imagined. Before my addiction took over, I would have never approached the world with a sense of wonder and adventure.

All of this being said, being sober AND gay is a whole different ballgame. A great deal of gay culture revolves around clubs and bars- places that were historically considered safe spaces, free from violence and oppression, for LGBTQ people. As luck would have it, my addiction started around the same time I accepted my sexuality and "came out". As my disease progressed, I became more and more alienated from those safe spaces, opting to alienate and withdrawal from other people. As the

addict took full control of my brain, I found that I spent most of my time using by myself. The idea of socializing was exhausting. Ever after achieving sobriety, the idea of socializing was terrifying. I felt that I did not know how to fit in or relate to other people, without the pretext of chemical aid. Given that the LGBTQ community still frequently fields on clubs and bars to foster community and fellowship, where would I be able to find my tribe as a sober, gay man?

The one thing holding me back was the idea that I had to be drunk or high to achieve any possibility of having a 'fun' life. I believed I had to somehow hold on to my old life and just not use those substances. Once I was able to let of my past last, I discovered that I was able to be fully present for my new one. Relationships, conversations, experiences- everything became novel and liberating. My whole definition of 'fun' was rewritten.

Seamus Kirst, author of *Shitfaced: Musings of a Former Drunk*:

During college, my whole idea of 'fun' revolved around drinking, and using drugs. My social life revolved around drinking, my romantic life revolved around drinking and my sex life revolved around drinking. Alcohol became the means through which I related to people, a way to quickly – if not superficially – bond with everyone else around me, many of who seemed to share my desire to get shitfaced.

Soon after graduating from college, I stopped drinking when I was 22-years-old. As I made the decision to become sober, I was terrified that I would never have 'fun' again. Regardless of all of the relationships I'd ruined, dangerous situations I'd put myself into, and general unhappiness I'd fostered, I still hung onto this notion that having fun was, in some way, synonymous with being intoxicated. Of course, as time has gone on, I have learned that could not be further from the truth. Of course now, when I am not drunk, it is less easy to have conversations with everyone around me, but why would I want to still be doing that? I prefer the idea that when you are sober you are more inclined to seek out conversations, friendships, relationships and activities that you actually enjoy, find important, or that make you feel good about yourself. When I used to drink, I was much less picky with what I was doing and whom I was doing it with, because nothing was ever really about much more than getting drunk. When people talk to me about wanting to get sober, they often express this fear about their social lives having to change. I think people sometimes want to be told that isn't true, but of course it is. But, what I have found, is that once you are committed to recovery, your life changes not because you are left behind, but rather because you have a reevaluation of what activities and friendships are actually beneficial and rewarding and which aren't.

But, that definitely doesn't mean you stop having fun.

Seamus Kirst is the author of the memoir, *Shitfaced: Musings of a Former Drunk*.

Dream With Us—How 'Gay and Sober Men' Brings Support, Love and Safety

By *Jean Sullivan* 06/24/16

Gay and Sober Men is a safe and fun community—and 2017 looks to be their biggest year yet.



In recent years, a question seemed to keep coming up—are special interest gay friendly meetings and LGBT-specific treatment centers relevant or even necessary in society's current age of progressiveness, tolerance, and acceptance? Marriage equality is now the law of the land and family-friendly companies like Disney even showcase gay and lesbian characters from time to time.

Then came the recent, tragic events in Orlando. And it became clear that now, more than ever, we need to provide a safe, affirming place—as well as events—for people in the LGBT community.

At the **Pride Institute**, a treatment center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one can go to rehab in an all-LGBT setting. Thus creating a safe space for absolute, un-edited honesty by its clients and further fostering an atmosphere of recovery. Pride opened its doors in 1986, at the height of the AIDS epidemic. The institute not only addresses client's drug and alcohol issues, but critical problems that plague the community such as discrimination and homophobia. Surprisingly, Pride is currently the only treatment center of its kind in the United States to offer this kind of immersive experience. However, more and more rehabs across the country offer an LGBT-friendly track to those clients that seek it.

June is national Pride month. Nearly every city has events and activities that celebrate the LGBT community. In New York City—where the modern gay rights movement started—they have a week packed with events, circuit parties, and parades. But along with Pride come lots of opportunities for drinking, partying, and indulgences. The highest admittance time of year at the emergency room of the former St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village is not New Year's Eve, but actually Gay Pride Weekend. **Studies** even suggest that up to 33% of the LGBTQ+ population have difficulty controlling their alcohol and drug use. **That number is even higher** in the transgender community.

Taking this into account, a group of sobers from all over the country have decided to mobilize, and have committed to making a difference for the sober or sober curious members of the gay community. What started out as a small private group of sober guys on Facebook in 2009 has mushroomed into the largest recovery group of its kind on social media. Last year, the private Facebook group—known as **Gay & Sober Men (GSM)**—polled its 6,000 online members, and it was decided that they all wanted to meet one another—in person, in real time! During next year's Pride weekend, these people will come together to celebrate recovery with the first annual international Gay & Sober Convention, a unique four-day men's conference in New York City.

The mission, according to Kori, Mathew, and Brandon—Gay & Sober's nonprofit board members—is borrowed from classic AA literature: “to watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow about you, to have a host of friends. We are doing this in the spirit of brotherhood, friendliness, fellowship, and adventure.”

This type of event has been done before, but it was held in Palm Springs and was known as Hot 'n Dry—another men's only roundup. This conference is different in that it's on the east coast and that it welcomes people that are not only in AA. People in NA or CMA will find programming specific to them, and even people that aren't in "12 step" but just love a sober lifestyle will be welcomed with open arms.

Activities will include health and wellness workshops, big speaker meetings, spiritual growth forums, and dance parties under the Pride fireworks. Thanks to social media and to enthusiastic sober “cheerleaders” from New York to Los Angeles, to London and even Tokyo, hundreds, perhaps thousands of fellows are expected to attend. It's a big undertaking to financially pull off a conference like this in a city like New York.

It will also take a village to make it a success. But the organizers and volunteers have high hopes. Mathew, from Edmonton, Canada, believes that “enthusiasm is contagious” and he is convinced that using social networking platforms will help get the word out as never before. GSM seems to be doing the right thing and is aware that some may even criticize its efforts. Speaking to that, one of the founding members who came up with the idea of the conference said, “Yes, there will be critics, but we aren't doing it for the critics. We are doing it for the community.” The team is steadfast in its vision of encouraging unity and enhancing one's sobriety. Fittingly, the theme for 2017 is “Dream With Us!”

Some of the event details are still in development. Most sober conventions and roundups are held at a host hotel where everything happens on property. At GSM, they are using a host hotel in Chelsea, aptly called The Dream. A sunrise guided meditation could be held in a park on Roosevelt Island or at the observation deck of One World Trade Center—both with inspiring vistas of the city. Several talented performers have also been invited to entertain at the Saturday night banquet meeting and concert near Columbus Circle. To close the weekend of sober events, the conference has several options—one is a float during the annual Gay Pride march down Fifth Avenue. The other is a dance cruise with two DJs on two floors of the Circle Line Cruise. The floating, rocking dance party will sail down the Hudson, through the harbor to the Statue of Liberty, and the climax of the beautiful evening will be a spectacular show of pride with the a fireworks display—all with the skyline of Manhattan as its backdrop.

This experience is a first time trial run for GSM. But if it all goes well, the possibilities are endless. The conference may even travel from city to city each year. After all is said and done, and in the spirit of giving back, Gay & Sober is putting any surplus revenue to good use by sponsoring up to three people within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender community that are in need of financial aid for inpatient treatment services.

Pride month started off on a very dark note with the Florida tragedy. But as we can all see, the rainbow colors are brighter and more visible than ever before. People in the LGBT community are coming together, and even sober fellows like the ones at Gay & Sober want to make this world a better, more loving place—because in the end...there is way more good than bad.

On a personal note, being a straight woman in recovery, I have been surrounded by and helped tremendously by sober fellows of the gay community. My numerous stints in rehabs taught me that I have an unhealthy need for male attention. This behavior would lead to a definite relapse if I were to continue it at outside AA meetings. I am fortunate enough to have found true friendship and love within the rooms, particularly from the gay members. For me it's attraction, not distraction, that keeps me coming back.

The conference dates are June 22nd - 25th, 2017.

Registration opens on December 1st and more information on volunteering & donating is available at www.gayandsober.org